

Growing Older and Keeping Healthy in Rural Tasmania

June 2010



About this Project:

This is the second newsletter from our research team looking into aspects of growing older and keeping healthy in rural Tasmania. The project is being conducted by the University of Tasmania, in partnership with the Home and Community Care (HACC) programme in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS). The project is an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage research project.

Phase 1 Completion:

We have now completed the first phase of our study and a substantial final report has just been published. The report, along with two briefer 'easy to read' summaries, will be sent to government departments and others who plan health services for rural Australia. They will soon be available for you to read on the project website (www.rcs.utas.edu.au/growingolder).



Our understanding of the experience of growing older in a Tasmanian rural community:

Thanks to the time that older rural participants spent sharing their experiences with our researcher, the research team now has a fuller understanding of what it is like to grow older in rural Tasmania. We were struck by the wide range of different experiences and were impressed with the strengths of older rural participants, who showed it was possible to meet the changes and challenges of ageing head-on and continue living independently and successfully. Our participants showed a stoic and self-reliant 'making the best of what they had' approach, often assisted by their sense of humour. The team are keen to help develop future services and supports for older rural people that work with, rather than against, these strengths. In particular:

- ◆ We have confirmed that older rural people do not fit neatly into "boxes";
- ◆ We have noted that the places in which older rural people are living are very important to their quality of life;
- ◆ We have realised just how much older rural people value being part of a community and having others around them to talk to, do things with and provide and receive support;
- ◆ We have seen the benefits of having rural aged care services and supports provided by local people who know their community and the people in it; and
- ◆ We have become convinced of the importance of giving these local service providers the resources and flexibility they need to provide the kinds of services and supports that older rural Tasmanians want.



Using findings to help plan future services:

We have been sharing our understanding gained from Phase 1 with rural aged care service providers and with the people who plan those services. These talks have shown us that all these people:

- ◆ do understand the issues that older rural people face;
- ◆ do approach their work as flexibly as they can; and
- ◆ do understand the need to continuously strive to respond sensitively to individual needs.



The rural aged care service providers we spoke to raised many of the same issues as the older rural participants: declining health and capacity; social loss and isolation; and distance and travel issues in relation to services. They talked about the need for a very flexible and adaptable, person-to-person approach to providing rural services and supports based on each individual's circumstances.

Phase 1 has shown us that providing rural aged care services and supports is a balancing act. We know that there is a need for services that can respond to older rural people as individuals, but also realise that there is a need to have a rural aged care system that works for everybody. We have also seen that there are further difficulties in providing services and supports because of the way that Tasmanian rural communities are changing – with the loss of jobs and younger people and families moving from rural communities, the increasing numbers of people from other parts of Tasmania, Australia and the world who want to live in rural communities, and the number of older retirees coming in from elsewhere.

What are our next steps?

Now, in Phases 2 and 3 of the project, the team is using the knowledge gained during Phase 1 to assist in developing community-based services and supports that are designed more specifically for older rural people in Tasmania. These services should:

- ◆ recognise older rural people have many strengths;
- ◆ take an individualised approach based on a good understanding of each older rural person and a careful response to their particular circumstances;
- ◆ make it both possible and easier for each individual, regardless of their personal qualities and circumstances, to choose to engage as fully as they desire in life;
- ◆ assist rural people to maintain vibrant communities that value their older people and encourage them to remain involved in community activities; and
- ◆ work with, and build on, the strengths that already exist in our rural communities.

Our next newsletter will provide more detail on these possible service and support options.

Don't forget to look for the full report on our website (www.rcs.utas.edu.au/growingolder). If you don't have access to the internet you can ring Jennifer Beamish at the Rural Clinical School in Burnie (Ph 6430 4564) and she will send you a copy.

**For more information about the project:
Visit our website at www.rcs.utas.edu.au/growingolder**

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